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Advocates help foster kids CASA volunteers provide children with support, supplies

Because of ProKids and special advocates, foster children can look for a brighter future.

ProKids, a nonprofit organization, trains and supports volunteers to work with foster children. The volunteers are court-appointed special advocates assigned to foster children to make sure their needs are met.

Last month, the volunteers went through a training session at the ProKids office in Walnut Hills, learning about services, programs and money available to children in the Hamilton County foster care system.

"It is important for CASAs to be aware of programs out in the community that can be used to help our children get the support they need," said Beth Turk, ProKids training manager.

Turk said these services could include finding a source to pay for glasses that medical care does not cover, school supplies, beds, summer camp, tutoring, transportation, prom outfits, computers and special medical care.

Speakers at the sessions included Sandy Blanchard, a CASA volunteer representing the Neediest Kids of All; General Electric engineer Karen Morgan, ProKids resource team leader; and Jennifer Bieger, a United Way 211 manager.

Blanchard has set up a special fund that advocates can tap in to for foster children.

Morgan and her team of 200 volunteers have driven vans and trucks to pick up and deliver furniture to different neighborhoods.

"Sometimes it is only a bed stopping a child from being able to move into a home with a relative instead of a foster home," Morgan said.

"When ProKids identifies a need that the welfare system doesn't provide, I get a call and the information is sent to the team of volunteers. You would be surprised how much people have to give and how quickly they respond."

UC STUDENTS HOLD RELAY FOR LIFE

The University of Cincinnati Relay For Life team raised \$116,000 to benefit the American Cancer Society last month on McMicken Commons.

The 139 student teams raised the money through sponsorships and exceeded UC's goal of \$115,000, which is \$12,500 more than raised in 2007.

Volunteers covered McMicken Commons wearing costumes related to Walt Disney movie characters. They stood by their tents with baked goods, grill-outs and other goodies to raise additional money for the relay.

Co-chairs were Florence Lucas, a sophomore and secondary-education major, and Lisa Winton, a third-year biology and premed major.

The Alpha Epsilon Pi "A Lions" was the top fundraiser with \$3,600.

The 2008 Relay for Life had more than 1,400 participants, including students and faculty.



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PROVIDED PHOTO

Sandy Blanchard, a ProKids volunteer, Karen Morgan, a ProKids resource team leader and Jennifer Bieger, a United Way 211 manager, spoke during a training session for court-appointed special advocates to children in foster care.

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Way 211 manager.

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BREAST CANCER FORUM OFFERED